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Mission permanente du Portugal
Genève

S T A T E M E N T

BY

THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF PORTUGAL

Ambassador António da Costa Lobo

IN

THE SUBCOMMISSION ON PREVENTION OF
DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

- item 6 -

August, 19th 1987

Mr. Chairman

1. We have listened carefully to the statements made, both by experts and by representatives of NGO's, on the situation of East Timor on the point of view of human rights.

2. At the outset we would like to note that several of the allegations made very much coincide with the reports that periodically reach our authorities, either through declarations of refugees or through letters from their families. It would, of course, be more appropriate for the sake of accuracy that these allegations be verified by independent observers, and it has been in this spirit that on several occasions we appealed to the occupying power to allow the territory of East Timor to be freely

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visited by agents of international media and by representatives of international organizations

3. Indeed, with the exception of the aspect of self--determination - which does not seem to need any in loco verification of facts - individual allegations of specific violations of human rights may naturally be the object of some controversy, and we would certainly wellcome any mechanism which would allow the confirmation - or non-confirmation - of what is alleged. But one conclusion seems to us unavoidable: the Government responsible for the absence of independent observation on the territory cannot dismiss as the allegations made unfounded, nor even claim the benefit of doubt.

4. I should like to stress that our wish to see the territory of East Timor open to the outside world does not emanate only from the legitimate interest of having a better information on the situation.

As a matter of fact, we strongly believe that the freedom of information in relation to a situation where human rights are, or may be, threatened or violated, is already an important step for the improvement of such a situation. On the contrary, to hide

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a situation from the eyes of independent observers, besides demonstrating an attitude of bad faith, only contributes to consolidate the wrongs and to jeopardize the possibilities of progress.

Mr. Chairman

5. According to declarations made before this organ by independent experts and by representatives of prestigious organizations, some of the most fundamental human rights - - including the right to life - continue to be violated in the territory of East Timor. Some of the violations that occur are elements of a policy which tries to force on the population a number of rules, of institutions and of ways of life which clashes with traditions, wishes and aspirations of the East timorese. This policy, inevitably, gives rise to an attitude of legitimate resistance on the part of the population. And the repression of this resistance leads to further violation of human rights, on a wider scale and in a more dramatic way.

The problem has to be solved in its roots, which implies the respect for the identity and for the specific characteristics of the population of East Timor. But in the

meantime we should not spare any effort in order to prevent, or to reduce as much as possible, the violations of human rights which continue to occur in the territory under consideration.

Mr. Chairman

6. At this occasion, our delegation is not going to enumerate specific violations of human rights. Any way, and as in the course of the 43rd session of the Commission on Human Rights we have mentioned one concrete case - the situation of four Timorese, following their studies in Jakarta, who were beeing prevented from leaving Indonesia - I would like to stress that, since then, the situation has not changed. As we then reported these four students - António Gonçalves, João Câmara, Fernando Silva and Abílio Sereno - have expressed their wish to leave Indonesia; but, although they are not accused of any wrong and have at their disposal portuguese passports, they have never been authorised to leave the country.

Mr. Chairman

7. Given the very positive, unique role the subcommission plays within the whole UN system, as a body of experts committed to independent reflection in the search of decisive action for the

protection of human rights, we believe this is a particularly qualified and appropriate forum to deal with the situation persisting in East-Timor. This organ benefits, first of all from the specific expertise and independence of its members. Besides it receives the important contribution of the N.G.O.'s. In this context I would like to express the opinion that in the still very imperfect system of international protection of human rights that presently exists, the NGO's seem to be in a somewhat privileged position for the purposes of obtaining information, publicizing it, and impressing the public opinion. Probably this is a consequence of the fact that NGO's, like human rights themselves, do not have national borders. In this context I would like to add that my country fully supports the important role that they are called to play in the system of international protection of human rights within the frame of the United Nations.

8. Portugal, through conversations that take place under the auspices of the Secretary General of the United Nations, is participating, with diligence and determination, in a process that aims at finding a global solution to the problem of East Timor. And we are confident that such a result would bring a radical improvement in the situation of the territory on the point of view of human rights.

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9. But protection of human rights that are beeing violated cannot wait, and action aimed at stopping or reducing violations should not, under any reason or pretext, be delayed. This is why we are here today, not in a formal capacity that we undoubtedly have, but as one of the many agents within a system, and in this capacity expressing our views, revealing our concerns, joining our efforts with the efforts of all other participants in this subcommission, and giving our contribution to a common objective: the protection of human rights.

I thank You, Mr. Chairman

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